

A RESOLUTION

IN THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND OPERATIONS

1 To authorize an investigation by the Committee on Public Works & Operations into the
2 unauthorized private for-hire-vehicle operations of Yazam, Inc., d/b/a Empower, in the
3 District of Columbia.

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5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND OPERATIONS,

6 That this act may be cited as the “Unauthorized Private For-Hire Vehicle Investigation
7 Authorization Resolution of 2024”.

8 Sec. 2. Findings.

9 (a) The Committee on Public Works & Operations finds that:

10 (1) The unauthorized operation of Yazam, Inc., d/b/a Empower, an app offering
11 private for-hire vehicle services in the District, constitutes a potentially imminent threat to the
12 safety and security of residents and visitors in the District, and warrants an investigation led by
13 the Chairperson of the Committee on Public Works and Operations (“the Committee”).

14 (2) Empower is not authorized to operate in the District, nor are the drivers who
15 use their app. Empower has not registered as a private vehicle-for-hire company with
16 Department of For-Hire Vehicles and is not in compliance – or has not shown proof of
17 compliance – with numerous laws and regulations to which such companies are subject,

18 including those covering consumer protection, discrimination, safety inspections, data disclosure,
19 background checks, and insurance coverage.

20 (3) The Department of For-Hire Vehicles issued two cease-and-desist orders and a
21 compliance order requiring Empower to remedy violations before April 4, 2024. The company
22 has yet to comply with any order or pay any fines issued for ongoing violations.

23 (4) The Committee has received reports of health and safety risks posed by
24 operators using the Empower app, including reports of stalking, harassment, and impaired
25 driving. Because of Empower's unauthorized status, there is currently no way for the Committee
26 or the public to understand the frequency of these problems, how many instances are reported,
27 and whether drivers who engaged in these activities are still permitted to use the platform.

28 (5) Additionally, Empower's failure to comply with laws pertaining to insurance
29 requirements for private for-hire-vehicle companies may expose riders to considerable financial
30 risk in case of injury.

31 (b) Pursuant to Rule 601(b) of the Rules of Organization and Procedure for the Council
32 of the District of Columbia, Council Period 25, the Committee authorizes an investigation in
33 accordance with subsection (c) of this section.

34 (c) The scope of the investigation authorized by subsection (b) of this section shall be:

35 (1) To investigate the extent of violations of District laws and regulations
36 governing private for-hire vehicles due to Empower's continued unauthorized operations and the
37 resulting lack of oversight;

38 (2) To ascertain the total amount owed to the District by Empower resulting from
39 unpaid taxes, civil penalties, and other fees;

40 (3) To determine the impact of Empower’s continued operations on riders,
41 operators, and the for-hire vehicle industry in the District as a whole;

42 (4) To consider whether updates to District law are needed to ensure the
43 protection of riders; and,

44 (5) To assess effective enforcement mechanisms to prevent future unauthorized
45 entry into the private for-hire-vehicle market.

46 (d) Pursuant to Rule 601, the Committee authorizes the use of subpoenas in in
47 furtherance of the investigation authorized by subsection (b) of this section to compel the
48 attendance of witnesses, to obtain testimony, or to produce documents or other information or
49 tangible items.

50 (e) In conducting the investigation, the Committee may take testimony of witnesses by
51 oral, written, or videotaped depositions.

52 Sec. 3. Effective date.

53 This act shall take effect immediately.